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ABSTRACT

Practicing teachers, especially those in rural settings, are demanding graduate programs which meet their emerging needs and schedules. Since 1979, the Continuing Education through Multi-Optional Renewal Experiences (CE/MORE) program at Oklahoma State University has enabled 60 teachers to complete their Master of Science in Education degrees. The program aims to deliver a process-oriented masters' program, deliver a "family" or collegiate model for formal graduate schooling, design learning experiences linking theoretical aspects to day-to-day classroom operations, and involve participants as partners in planning, implementation, and evaluation. Two assigned faculty members are responsible for CE/MORE program management and development. Traditional admission requirements are maintained. Students progress through the program as a group. Approximately two-thirds of the course work is offered at the local site on weekends, between semesters, and during late afternoon classes. The CE/MORE curriculum is a blend of traditional resident courses and core courses (curriculum/instruction, social foundations, research/evaluation, educational psychology, and human relations) conducted in nontraditional format. Course delivery often includes a combination of a workshop format, briefings, seminars, field trips, lectures, and discussion. CE/MORE assists school systems in establishing/upgrading the local professional library. Because of pride, high academic performance becomes a major goal of CE/MORE student groups. (NEC)

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CE/MORE: A Rural Staff Development Model

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Running Head: CE/MORE

Abstract

Practicing teachers, in all locations, especially those in rural settings, are demanding graduate programs which meet their emerging needs and schedules. Few universities however, have responded innovatively to these needs. CE/MORE (Continuing Education Through Multi-Optional Renewal Experiences) is a flexible, quality-oriented approach for the delivery of masters-level graduate work to practicing professionals in rural areas.

CE/MORE: A Rural Staff Development Model

Interest in staff development activities has increased at all levels of education during the past several years. The subject of staff development has been the focus of conferences, seminars, and workshops. Articles, books, and monographs have been written on the topic and school systems are presently devoting time and financial resources to staff development. The need for quality staff development programs for public school personnel has been validated (Dillon, 1976; McLaughlin & Berman, 1977; McLeod, 1975; Miller, 1977).

Howsam (1976) identifies three components in the education of teachers; preservice, inservice, and continuing education. He defines preservice as the preparation of teachers prior to their first employment and inservice as the activities school districts conduct in order to train their teachers in a particular mode of education. Howsam maintains that continuing education is an ongoing process after initial entry into the profession and is the responsibility of the individual.

Hendee (1976) categorize all aspects of inservice, (inservice programs, inservice development, and continuing education) under the broad heading of staff development. He defines staff development as:

> . . . the sum of all planned activities designed for the purpose of improving, expanding, and renewing the skills, knowledge and abilities of participants. This includes institutes, workshops, special purpose meetings in and out of school, as well as in and out of education (p. 163).

Teacher inservice education, as one aspect of staff development, is receiving considerable attention. One can argue that inservice education has become so popular that it has become synonymous with staff development. We believe, however, that continuing education, as a function of staff development, is not receiving the attention it deserves. From our perspective, staff development includes both inservice programs and continuing education. Inservice education is a set of organized activities planned deliberately by the school system for the primary purpose of improving the knowledge and competence of the professional staff. Continuing education is the ongoing process by which teachers continue professional education during their careers. Inservice education is the responsibility of the school system: continuing education is the responsibility of individual professionals.

These definitions raise a question: Can institutions of higher education deliver to local rural education agencies, staff development programs that meet requirements inherent in these two clearly distinguishable but related components, inservice education and continuing education? If the answer is yes, then a second question must be asked. Can this delivery result in a nontraditional master's degree program for participating teachers?

Theory Base

In the Spring of 1978, interested faculty from the departments of Curriculum and Instruction and Applied Behavioral Studies in the College of Education at Oklahoma State University met for the purpose of discussing these questions. A concern arose as to what could be done to modify the traditional involvement of the two departments with rural practicing

professionals. The group reached consensus, trite though critical, that certain principles of learning are appropriate to the education of both practicing professionals and preservice students. These learning principles are: (a) Learning is a process involving experiencing, doing, and reacting; (b) In designing instructional strategies, the purpose of the learner must be taken into consideration and the learning situation must be realistic to the learner; (c) Learning should occur through a variety of experiences, using materials and activities appropriate to the learner; and (d) Learning is effective when learners are involved in creating learning tasks, can see results, and have appropriate feedback about their progress.

Basic Assumptions And Goals

Through dialogue, this faculty group reached concensus that any nontraditional outreach effort involving the two departments would be based on three assumptions. Fundamental education reform will come only through those charged with the basic educational responsibility, the teachers. Teachers are unlikely to change their ways of doing things simply because administrators and college professors tell them to do so. Teachers will take reform seriously only when they are responsible for defining their educational concerns, delineating their needs, and receiving help on their terms.

Based on the preceding theory base and assumptions, goals for a rural nontraditional master's degree program were established. These goals are:

1. To develop a continuing education program relevant to rural public school educators' perceived needs.
2. To build an inservice program sensitive to the needs, interests, and concerns of these teachers.

3. To develop a continuing education program involving public school personnel as partners in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the experience.
4. To deliver continuing education and inservice programs that have practical value for the rural teachers.

CE/MORE

During the Spring of 1979, interested teachers from one rural school district met with faculty representatives from the two College of Education departments to explore the feasibility of delivering a nontraditional master's degree program to the local site. Exploratory dialogue resulted in an agreement to tailor a master's degree program to the needs of this group of teachers if certain conditions could be met. A minimum of 25 teachers would have to participate and consensus would have to be reached on the focus of the program.* Sites and times must be agreed upon for delivery, and the needs, wants, and concerns of the group must be translated into academically respectable content reflecting a quality master's degree program.

At subsequent planning meetings, careful consideration was given to the development of a sound theoretical base for the nontraditional program, well grounded in characteristics of adult learners. Several faculty members also visited other universities where non-traditional masters level programs have been initiated in urban settings. From these planning sessions a project called Continuing Education Through Multi-

*In succeeding programs, several small rural districts have banned together in order to meet the minimum of 25 students. Requiring this number of students is necessary since off-campus delivery is more expensive than on-campus courses.

Optional Renewal Experiences (CE/MORE) evolved. The main thrust of the program is to:

1. Deliver a process-oriented master's degree program to participants.
2. Deliver a "family" or collegiate model for formal schooling at the graduate level.
3. Design learning experiences linking theoretical aspects from the discipline of education to day-to-day operations in the classroom.
4. Involve participants as partners in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the learning experiences.

A team of highly motivated and dedicated full professors piloted the program which required them to deliver course work in different formats, as members of an instructional team, and within unaccustomed time frames. Table 1 is an attempt to contrast the traditional on-campus master's degree program with the rural nontraditional program, CE/MORE.

Insert Table 1 about here

Administration. Administration of the traditional master's program is the responsibility of the department head and follows departmental guidelines. Two faculty members are assigned to the CE/MORE project, one each in the capacity of program management and program development. These two faculty members have the responsibility of orchestrating the program and are a part of the CE/MORE Program Committee. The Program Committee supervises needs assessment and

student selection; recommends faculty for course/experience sequence; handles the development of plans of study, scheduling, and enrollment; arranges for instructional resources; and makes operating decisions.

Admission to graduate study. The academic standards for admission to the traditional on-campus master's degree program are maintained in every respect for CE/MORE programs.

Grouping of Learners. In the traditional on-campus master's program, learners are grouped according to enrollment in courses which often results in students being forced into a competitive mold. In the CE/MORE program, students, for the most part, progress through the program as a group. As a result, these adult learners develop a group identity and provide a support system in their joint venture. Study groups for example, are student organized and directed. Obtaining a master's degree becomes a cooperative rather than a highly competitive endeavor.

Location. Students in the traditional master's program typically are commuters (often from long distances) and take the majority of course work on campus during evening hours and summer sessions. In the CE/MORE program, approximately two-thirds of the course work is offered at the local site and one-third on campus. Though it seems logical to deliver the total program locally, the CE/MORE professors and students have agreed that it would be unfortunate for teachers to earn degrees from an institution they had never attended.

Time/Space Arrangements. The traditional master's degree program offers course work according to time specifications established by the University. In the CE/MORE format, professors deliver course work in unaccustomed time frames, such as on weekends, between semesters, and

during the semester in late afternoon classes. Courses are offered at times which accommodate the busy schedules of adult learners. This has not presented a problem since the students are employed by the same or neighboring school systems. Media centers and school libraries serve as classrooms at the local site.

Faculty. In the traditional program, faculty teach courses assigned to them. A selected group of full-time professors serve as the CE/MORE faculty. Their academic backgrounds reflect specialties in social organization, curriculum and instruction, counseling, social and philosophical foundations, learning theory, and research and evaluation. Other faculty are involved as expertise is needed to meet the needs identified by the CE/MORE graduate students.

Curriculum. Curriculum for the traditional campus program is established according to preconceived criteria identified by faculty. Very little, if any, effort is made to adjust this to individual student's needs. The curriculum for CE/MORE is a blend of traditional resident courses and an offering of core courses (curriculum and instruction, social foundations, research and evaluation, educational psychology, and human relations) conducted in a nontraditional format. Since the content for the CE/MORE program is based on the expressed needs of participating graduate students, individual professors modify content to accommodate the uniqueness of the local site. In all instances, however, Graduate College guidelines for a master's degree program are met.

Instruction. The instructional style of professors in the traditional master's program is at the discretion of the individual professors. This is true of the CE/MORE program as well. The on-site flexibility, however,

allows professors and the learning group to be responsive to different modes as needs emerge. Various instructional styles are utilized, depending upon needs, learning styles, and content. Instructional styles include team teaching, lecture, discussion, and problem solving. Due to the high level of student motivation, independent study also is encouraged. The delivery of a single course often includes a combination of a workshop format, briefings, seminars, field trips, as well as lecture and discussion.

Materials/Resource Library. Critics of off-campus-based master's programs often argue that students do not utilize the university library. Since most traditional master's programs in education are commuter programs relying heavily on evening courses, library usage is a problem. To overcome this concern, the CE/MORE team assists the school system in establishing or upgrading the local professional library. The team has received the full cooperation of local librarians in this effort. School systems have been willing to subscribe to journals recommended by the team, to purchase books, and to house, in a central file, copies of journal articles selected by professors. CE/MORE students also use the university library extensively either individually or as a group with the professor's assistance. It is common for a class to meet on campus on Saturday and spend the day in library research.

Evaluation. Evaluation of CE/MORE students is consistent with Graduate College guidelines. Standard evaluations procedures are used. Careful monitoring of student performance in course work and through comprehensive examinations insure program quality. In fact, students have developed a sense of ownership of the program and quality becomes their concern. Because of pride, high academic performance becomes a major

goal of the CE/MORE groups.

Advantages of CE/MORE

The CE/MORE approach has revealed many advantages to the graduate students and professors.

1. The adult learners develop a group identity and provide a support system in their joint venture. Obtaining a master's degree becomes a cooperative rather than a highly competitive endeavor.
2. The adult learners are encouraged to research alternatives for educational concerns and problems they perceive in their school systems. They critically study their own classroom dynamics.
3. The adult learners examine their schools and community as a social system. They gain an understanding of the environments within which they must function as professionals and live as individuals.
4. The program requires a different delivery model from professors and encourages them to become learners. Professors meet on a regular basis to plan and seek more effective teaching strategies.
5. The "ivory tower" concept often associated with university professors is overcome and students and professors become partners in learning.

6. The CE/MORE professors have found the nontraditional approach to be a professional renewal experience. They have learned, among other things, the value of modeling as an alternative to professing.

Conclusion

To date, over 60 teachers in three CE/MORE programs have completed their Master of Science in Education degrees and three have matriculated for the on-campus doctorate. CE/MORE programs are progressing in two other rural communities. Initial meetings with a sixth group of prospective CE/MORE students have been scheduled.

Increasingly, practicing professionals in rural areas, especially those at mid-career, are demanding continuing education and inservice programs which meet their emerging needs and schedules. Few universities have begun to respond innovatively to these needs. CE/MORE is a quality program using a flexible approach for delivery of master's-level graduate work to practicing professionals in education. The program demonstrates the ability of college faculty to respond creatively to the emerging needs of staff development for teachers in rural settings.

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Table 1

Contrasting Functions of Traditional and CE/MORE Master's Programs

Functions	Traditional	CE/MORE
Administration	Department Head	Two faculty serve as coordinator and faculty team leaders
Admission to Graduate Study	University regulations	University regulations
Grouping of Learners	Enroll in courses as offered, competitive base	Courses offered as needs identified, family grouping
Location	University campus	Local site, University campus
Time/Space	Scheduled classes, typical college classrooms	Scheduled classes, unaccustomed time frames, library or media centers

Table 1 (continued)

Functions	Traditional	CE/MORE
Faculty	Assigned faculty	Volunteer faculty, members of CE/MORE team
Curriculum	Departmental guidelines	Departmental guidelines, expressed needs of participants, portfolio
Instructional Styles	Faculty choice	Faculty choice, team teaching, variety of delivery modes
Materials/Resources Library	University library, A.V. center	University library, A.V. center, local professional library
Student Evaluation	Standard university evaluation procedures, comprehensive examinations	Standard university evaluation procedures, comprehensive examinations